

# ADVENTURES

IN WESTERN NEW YORK HISTORY



## Old Fort Niagara

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*Gate of the Five Nations, Fort Niagara.*





## OLD FORT NIAGARA

by Ann Kelleran

**F**OR MORE than three centuries, due to its location, the Niagara Frontier has been one of the most talked-of, traveled-through, worried-about, fought-over places in the world. The first settlements in North America were along the eastern coast because this was the nearest to the sailing ports of Europe. Not all the people who came to the New World wanted to stay in these settlements. Some men, explorers, wanted to find out about the land beyond the little colonies. Other men, priests, wanted to tell the Indians about the Christian religion. Still others, traders, wanted to become rich by trading for beaver pelts, needed in Europe to make stylish beaver hats for men and coats for women. These purposes could be accomplished by going west, and it was not long before a fast and easy route was discovered. This route followed the St. Lawrence River to Lake Ontario and from there a thousand miles inland on the Great Lakes and their connecting waterways.

For over one hundred years canoes were the best way to travel west and the Great Lakes were the major trade routes. There was a barrier to free passage between Lakes Ontario and Erie, however. These Lakes are connected by the Niagara River which has a 160-foot drop at Niagara Falls. Therefore, traffic was funneled into a narrow lane thirty-four miles long and it was necessary to portage, or carry, everything around the Falls.

The Niagara Frontier is the land on both sides of the Niagara River and along Lakes Erie and Ontario where the River begins and ends, which means it is the land all along the water where the canoe traffic came together, slowed down, stopped, and started up again. The Niagara Frontier, therefore, was of great strategic importance and traffic up the river and overland was controlled from the spot where Old Fort Niagara stands today, on the eastern shore where the river flows into Lake Ontario. As the area south of Lake Ontario became "trapped out" traders went farther west and south to the Ohio and Mississippi regions. To ship furs east they had to pass the key point, the site of Fort Niagara. Hence, during a hundred-year period, France, England, the Iroquois, and the United States fought over the Niagara Frontier, and in particular, over Fort Niagara.

Later, when trails could be used and canoes were no longer seen on the Great Lakes, the location kept the Niagara Frontier important to western travel. Most of the people who wanted to go west to settle were from the New England and eastern New York area. For them, the best of the few natural routes through all the Appalachian Mountains started at Albany and led to the Niagara Frontier. The Erie Canal was built along this route; later the railroads followed the same path and cities developed as people and

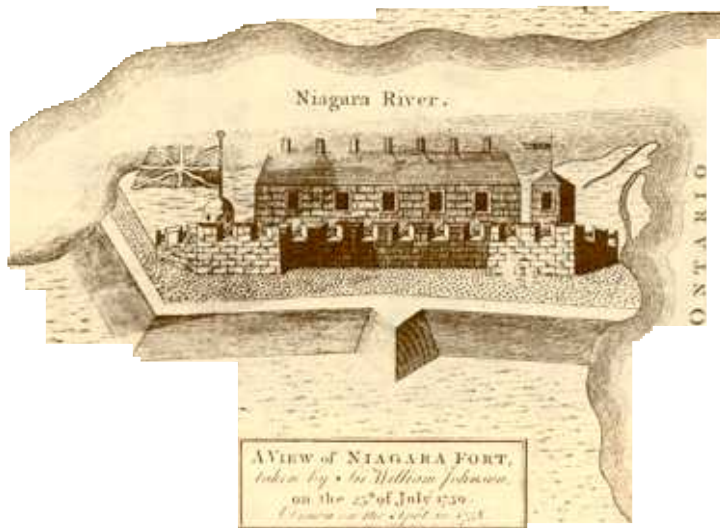
products moved from east and west. Today, the St. Lawrence Seaway is a new source for traffic into this area. In the three hundred years since the first European's canoe was portaged around the Falls a great deal has happened along the Niagara Frontier. We cannot put all this history into a few pages, but we can find some of the most exciting events in the history of the oldest buildings on the Frontier—Old Fort Niagara.

The French were the first white men to see the Indians' treeless fishing and camping ground where Old Fort Niagara stands today. There were reasons for this. First, the important French settlements of Quebec and Montreal were along the St. Lawrence River. The French, English, and Dutch had all started settling the New World at the same time, in the early 1600's, but the French settlements had the Great Lakes waterway flowing by their front doors while the others built colonies along the Atlantic seaboard. Secondly, the French colony was run differently from the others. The governments of England and the Netherlands were interested in what was happening in America, but they let companies do the work of finding settlers and making rules. The French government very soon took over the Company of New France and started making all the rules. As a result everyone in New France worked for the king in a type of feudal system. Since the French government was also anxious to own as much land as possible and develop trade in it, the king sent explorers into the West.

René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle, was given permission by King Louis XIV to try "to discover the western part of New France." In 1536 Jacques Cartier had claimed all the lands drained by the St. Lawrence River, but the French had no idea of the extent of this area until reports were heard from explorers, missionaries, and traders. By the time La Salle set out it was known that one could go all the way by water, except for the Niagara portage and one western portage, from Fort Frontenac (Kingston, Ontario) to the mouth of the Mississippi. La Salle sailed from France in May 1678, to attempt this and to find the source of the Mississippi. It was his dream that France would some day rule an empire in America.

King Louis was very shrewd. He knew that La Salle would be willing to explore in any case, so imposed three difficult conditions: the exploring must be done in five years; La Salle could not trade furs with the Indians who traded in Montreal; La Salle had to pay his own expenses. Louis was going to get some free exploring done as well as protect his fur business. But La Salle was shrewd, too. He planned to build a ship, sail it west, load it with furs and send it back, selling the furs to repay the money he had borrowed for his explorations. The plan was almost successful!

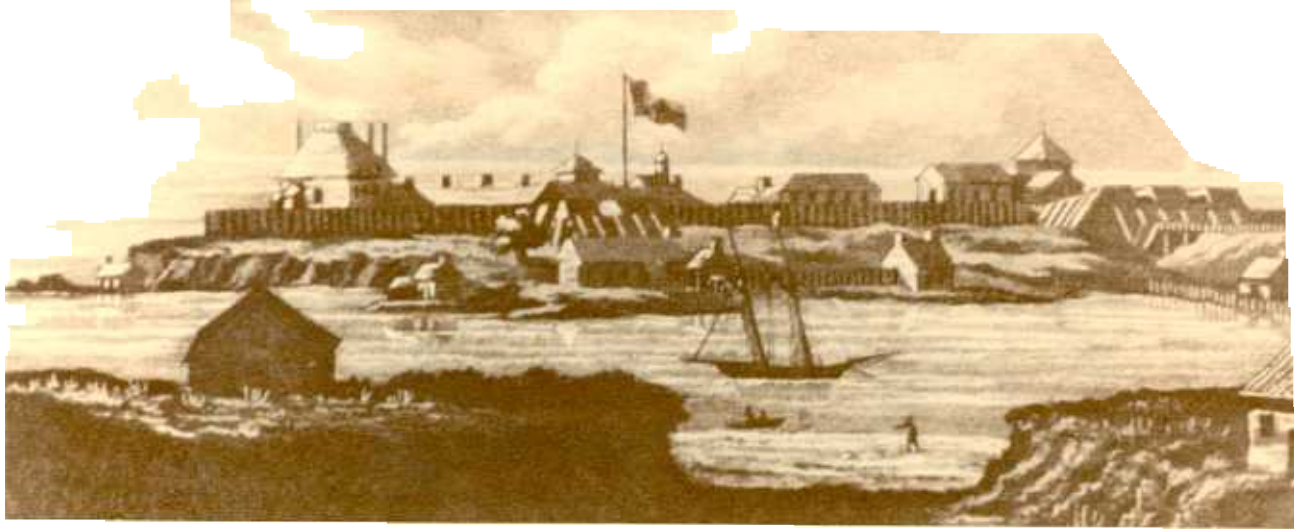
Although other Europeans probably had been to the Niagara Frontier before La Salle's expedition in the winter of 1678-1679, he is the first who wrote of his adventures. From his own and Father Hennepin's accounts we know that La Salle sent his lieutenant, Henri de Tonty ahead to establish a



camp at the mouth of the Niagara River. Father Hennepin, a Franciscan missionary, followed with a second party. In December this group erected a storehouse at Lewiston, the first European structure on the Niagara. Here, in January 1679, on the east bank of the Niagara River just south of the mouth of Cayuga Creek, the keel was laid for the ship La Salle planned to sail west. The boat was named the *Griffon* and launched the following May. Towed to the foot of the Little Rapids beside Squaw Island it sailed on August 7, 1679, and passed into the waters of Lake Erie. It proceeded up the lake, loaded furs obtained from western Indians and fully laden started its return journey, without La Salle, Tonty, or Father Hennepin, who had continued west to do further exploring. Somewhere the *Griffon* was lost with all hands, and with it La Salle's hopes of making a fortune.

The winter before, while camped at the mouth of the Niagara, La Salle had had a fort built which he named Fort Conti after his patron, the Prince of Conti. It might be called the first Fort Niagara as it was on the site of the later fort. In 1673 Count de Frontenac, the Governor of New France, had written Colbert, the Minister of Finance, that a fort at the mouth of the Niagara and a ship on Lake Erie would let the French control the fur trade of the Upper Lakes. That is probably one reason why La Salle built the fort; another was that he could store supplies there. This is what La Salle wrote about Fort Conti:

The Iroquois did not oppose the construction of the Fort commenced at the discharge of Lake Erie . . . I contented myself with making there two redoubts, forty feet square, upon a point, made of great timbers one upon another, musket proof and joined by a palisade, where I put a sergeant and several men, who during my absence allowed all this work to burn through negligence; and not being in condition to restore it, there remains only a magazine.



*Fort Niagara, 1814. View from Canadian shore.*

Although La Salle had little trouble with the Iroquois, he realized they might not want a fort built on the Niagara. The Fort was intended to help the French fur business, but anything that helped the French at that time was likely to hurt the Iroquois, who traded primarily with the English and who were in competition with the French for the Western Indians' furs. The Iroquois, like almost all the tribes in the northern part of our continent, had quickly become dependent upon European trade goods. They needed iron and brass tools and woolen blankets because they had become accustomed to having them, and because they had forgotten how to make stone knives and bone awls and clay pots. One tribe, the Hurons, made a business of taking trade goods all over the West to other tribes, picking up the beaver pelts in exchange. Because they had established connections with western tribes, they became the middlemen for the French and had almost a monopoly on this trade. The Iroquois traded with the Dutch in Albany and with the English in New England.

It was a serious matter for the Iroquois and their English buyers when the supply of beaver decreased south of Lake Ontario. By 1640 they were all gone and the Iroquois were desperate. They tried several times to make peaceful agreements with the Hurons for part of their "middleman" business. The Hurons, having French encouragement, saw no reason to fear the Iroquois and would not share the trade. The Iroquois did the only thing they could do if they were to have furs to trade. They went on the warpath. In seven years, from 1649 to 1656, they attacked and conquered the Hurons, the Neutrals, and the Eries. This did not solve their problem because the Ottawas, a tribe living north of Lake Ontario, allies of the Hurons and French, took over the "middleman" business. Therefore, the Iroquois began raiding the western Indians and blockading the trade routes. They made sure no one went through what is now New York to French territory. This naturally decreased, and for a time stopped, French trade. When the Iroquois agreed to neutrality between the French and British, in 1688, they kept the land route through New York closed. Thus they continued as middlemen for the Brit-

ish, who had taken over the Dutch settlements. They also found it good business to be sought as allies by both the French and the British. The Frontier, therefore, was extremely important. The Iroquois wanted to guard the western end of their territory; the French wanted to protect their route to the heart of New France; and the British wanted the western furs.

The French thought of the region around the Great Lakes and the Mississippi as French territory because La Salle and others had claimed it for France. The British did not care who had claimed it; they wanted the beaver in it. When Governor Denonville heard that a British trading party had passed over the Niagara portage in 1685, and that they were dealing more generously in trade with the Western Indians than the French were, he was deeply concerned. He had to guard the western regions from the English, and also from the raiding Iroquois. In the summer of 1687, after an attempt at punishing the Iroquois by invading the Senecas near Irondequoit Bay, he built the second "Fort Niagara." Although it had no name, historians refer to it as "Fort Denonville." The Governor had hoped it would be a large fort where married farmers could live, traders could buy supplies, and the allied Illinois could drive off the Iroquois. The king, however, would allow only a small log fortification to be built—one that could be protected from a surprise attack, but could not stand a siege.

The designer of Fort Denonville was the Sieur de Villeneuve, who in the year before had surveyed the site. He wrote: "I have selected the angle on the Seneca side formed by the Lake and the River . . . it is the most beautiful, the most pleasing, and the most advantageous site on the whole of that Lake . . ." His plan was a simple one. The fort would be square, with bastions at the corners, and all around it would be a high palisade. It was built in only a few days because Denonville had about 800 French soldiers and 800 militia helping him. The hardest part of the construction was the hauling of the logs from the forests to the clearing.

When Denonville sailed back to Fort Frontenac, he had few worries about the men left in the garrison. The Indians of the Detroit River were to bring fresh meat during the winter, and a ship was on its way with provisions. The supply ship arrived in August. After it had left the men discovered the flour was wet and the biscuits were full of weevils. It was too late in the season to try to raise vegetables, and the men didn't dare go out to hunt or fish because the Senecas, furious at the French for attacking them the summer before, were lurking outside of the fort's palisade. In fact the men were so sick and frightened that one of the officers wrote: "The wood choppers, one day, facing a storm, fell in the drifts just outside the gate; none durst go out to them. The second day the wolves found them—and we saw it all." No fresh meat was brought to them during the winter, and there are no records of sending for help. When the relief ship came the next April, only twelve men were found alive. The other eighty-eight died of hunger or disease or cold. Father



Jean Milet was with this second garrison, and on Good Friday, 1688, he erected a tall oak cross in memory of the dead. The fort lasted through that summer. Then, because it was too expensive to maintain, and since the English had objected to it and the Iroquois had demanded its demolition, the palisades were broken down and the fort abandoned. One account tells us that the buildings were left standing with their doors open; another that the buildings were burned.

New France could have made Louis XIV and Louis XV the richest kings in Europe if they had not made mistakes and had not had savage business competitors for neighbors. The Iroquois and the French were never friends, and the French wanted to buy pelts from more tribes than just those of the Iroquois, and the Iroquois wanted to sell to more white men than just the French, yet each nation wanted to be the only one to deal with the other. Consequently the Iroquois took advantage of their ideal location to interfere with the French trade. The French kings found it necessary to spend a great deal of money to fight the Iroquois and to buy them peace presents.

One weakness in the king's policy was permitting only Catholics to settle in New France. If all religions had been allowed, there would have been more settlers to develop the colony's wealth. As it was, the majority who came wanted only to make their fortunes and return to France. In later years there was only one person in New France for every ten people in the British colonies. Furthermore these fewer people were spread over a much larger area. This proved a serious disadvantage for the French when they fought for their empire in America.

King Louis XIV made a serious mistake in his fur trade policy. In the early days of the trade the Indians took their furs to the St. Lawrence River settlements. When beaver became scarce in the east, and the French trading allies were driven to the West by the Iroquois, it became necessary for the traders to build trading posts or to send licensed voyageurs as representatives into the wilderness to do the actual trading. The voyageurs were daring and fearless French colonials who could paddle and portage a canoe for thousands of miles as well as survive hunger, cold, wild animals, and Indians. Their jobs and those of the traders were uncertain from year to year because the laws concerning them were uncertain. From 1698-1714 the law said that if any colonial were caught carrying trade goods to the West, he would be sentenced to slavery in the galleys. There were two reasons why King Louis revoked the licenses: one was that there were more beaver pelts on the French market than could be used because most of the hatmakers had been driven out of France by the Edict of Nantes; the second one was that the influential Jesuits did not like the heavy-drinking, hard-living voyageurs corrupting themselves and spoiling the missionary work with the Western Indians. One voyageur had summed up wilderness living when he wrote: "We were Caesars being nobody to contradict us."





"The Castle," Fort Niagara, 1892.

The law had very bad consequences. The Indians were supposed to bring their furs to Montreal, but very few did. Either they didn't trade at all, or they traded with the English. All the French garrisons were abandoned because the officers did not want to stay on without the privilege of trading. Although their trading had always been illegal, many fortunes had been made by military men stationed in the West. So it was that the empire which France had been building for fifty years was allowed to fall apart.

When the French officially withdrew from the West, the British traders and the Iroquois middlemen could not let such a wonderful trade opportunity go by. They started doing business with France's former customers. A few Frenchmen did stay to trade, but they also did their business with the English in Albany. They were known as *coureurs de bois* (runners of the woods), who sometimes traded with the Indians without licenses. With so many people working for the British, it was not long before the Western Indians discovered the bargains they had been missing. In Montreal they paid five beaver for one gun, two beaver for one blanket. In Albany the price of a gun was two beaver, of a blanket, one beaver. The best and most important buy, however, was English powder and lead.

When the French government relicensed the fur traders it never overcame the problem of prices. The licensed French traders had to deal with a company whose prices were set by the government, and the government could never afford to have prices as low as the private companies of the British. It lost money even on the high prices it set. When the traders went back to work in 1714 the old posts had to be re-established and new garrisons built all the way to the Ohio. This was necessary to protect the traders and to keep in touch with the Western Indians, but it was expensive.

In 1706 a paper was sent to Versailles listing the reasons why a fort should be built on the Niagara. These reasons are a good summary of what the French colonials were thinking and they explain why the French eventually erected Fort Niagara. The writer, probably a priest, believed that it was the best of all places to trade with the Iroquois, that a fortress there would keep



*South Block House and Barracks, 1902.*

the Iroquois in check and would be a refuge for Indian allies as well as a supply point for a fort at Detroit. Further, it would be timesaving to be able to sail from Fort Frontenac to the Niagara in a ship rather than go by canoe. Finally, the fort would be a barrier for anyone going to trade with the English. The writer also suggested that Joncaire make the building arrangement with the Senecas.

Louis Thomas de Joncaire, Sieur de Chabert, was born in Provence, probably about 1670. Sometime during his late teens he came to America on military service, and was captured by the Senecas. No one now knows exactly why he was not tortured to death by the Indians. One story is that as he was being tied to the stake to be burned alive, he accidentally hit one of his captors on the nose. The Senecas, thinking he had done it on purpose and admiring him for his daring, released him. In any event he was adopted into the tribe and became well-liked and respected. After his release in 1694 he became an interpreter and diplomat for the French. Starting about 1704 he was on the Niagara Frontier trying to make the Iroquois the allies of the French by giving them presents. Although he was often accused of cheating when he used some of these goods for his own trading, he performed valuable services for the French.

In 1720 he was given permission by the Iroquois to build a cabin at the beginning of the portage near Lewiston. It was called *Magazin Royale*. The English were furious that the French should have this trading post on such an important spot. They immediately tried to get permission to do just about everything: to build a "cabin" right next to Joncaire's; to tear his "cabin" down; to buy land along the river from Lake Ontario to the Falls, or even to Lake Erie! But Joncaire's influence was too strong, and the British were not allowed to carry out any of these plans. However, *Magazin Royale* by no means got all the trade that passed it. In 1722 a group of former French customers, the Ottawa, passed by on their way to Albany.

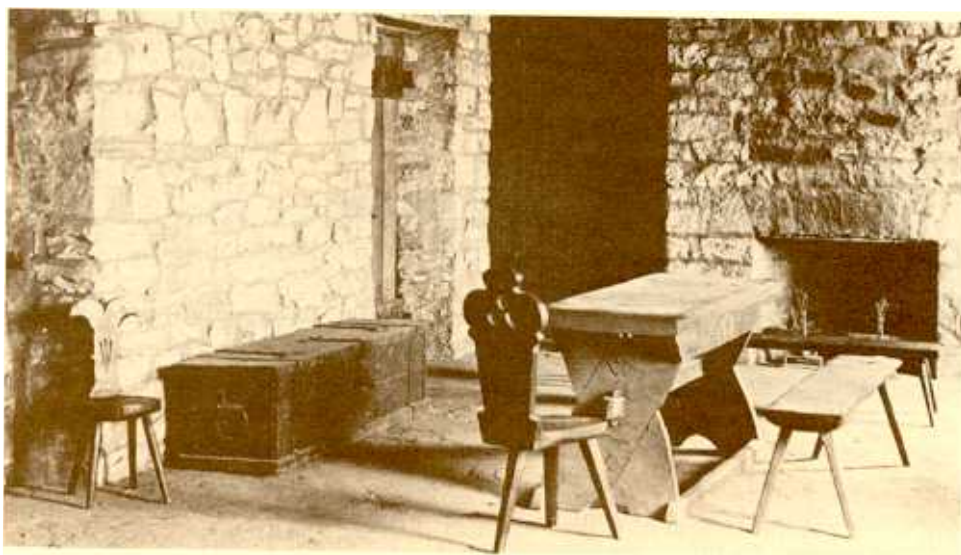


Next, Joncaire received permission to build a stone "house of peace" where trade goods could be kept. It was to be on the same site as the cabin, but the French decided the mouth of the river would be better, for there they could intercept the trade heading for Albany and the new British post at Oswego. This simple "castle" was designed to be a complete fortress. Gaspard Chaussegros de Léry, the architect, had ships bring stone from Fort Frontenac so that the walls would be four feet thick, both bullet- and fire-proof. Few wooden partitions or floors showed inside the building. Most of the floors were paved with flat stones.

When the castle was completed it was the finest fortress in New France. The first floor had a store for trade as well as a bakery, the main kitchen, a powder magazine, storerooms, and an inside well. The living quarters, a small kitchen and chapel were on the second floor. The loft of this "house of peace" was made of good oak beams so that cannon could be mounted there. Fort Niagara had been scheduled to be finished in September of 1726, but some voyageurs who had caught a fever from the Indians in the West stopped by long enough to infect all the workmen. As a result it was not completed until the next year.

The English lost no time in demanding that the Fort be torn down, but due to the constant efforts of Joncaire, and later those of his two sons Philippe and Daniel (Chabert), the Senecas allowed it to stand. Somehow the Joncaires managed to convince the Iroquois it would be best to have both trading countries represented in their territory. From 1730 on, however, the British were determined to capture Fort Niagara because it was a major link in the chain of French forts along the Ohio and Upper Lakes. When in 1755 General Braddock unsuccessfully set out to take Forts DuQuesne (Pittsburgh) and Niagara, these were his instructions from the British Ministry: "As to your design of making yourself master of Niagara, which is of the greatest consequence, his Royal Highness recommends to you to leave nothing to chance in the prosecution of that enterprise."

Life at Fort Niagara was at times as exciting and adventurous, at times as dull and tedious, as life in the twenty-three other French forts. The trading season was from April to August. During those months flotillas of fur-laden canoes would arrive from the West. The loud-singing, brightly-capped and -sashed voyageurs might go on to Montreal, and the coureurs de bois and Indians on to Oswego and Albany, but as each canoe came into view along the Niagara Frontier the residents of the Fort would hope the trading would be done there. A regular soldier's pay at Fort Niagara was a penny a day plus one-half pound of beef and one and one-half pounds of bread. The Canadians who worked as laborers or boatmen received only their food as wages. Consequently everyone hoped to do a little illegal trading in order to make some extra money. The official traders, or agents, were also apt to be dishonest or careless in keeping the king's accounts.



The Fort would have other visitors during the good traveling months. The supplies for western forts, especially Detroit, would be taken over the Niagara portage. On occasion prisoners would be sent to the Fort—British soldiers and traders. More often French deserters, who preferred the wilderness to military duty in a frontier post, would be brought through under guard on their way back to France. There were the expeditions which tried to regain Indian allies and frighten British traders out of French territory. Expeditions were necessary, but another great expense for the king. Often the leaders would order excessive supplies on the king's account so that they could sell the surplus. Women's shoes, Spanish wines, and velvets were often on the supply lists. The most famous of the expeditions was that of Céloron in 1749. He and his men were sent to the Ohio-Allegheny area to place lead plates which declared the land belonged to France. The ceremonies of burying these plates unfortunately did not influence the Indians as much as the larger number of British traders in the area. Families also came through on their way to join husbands and fathers at their posts. Although this was forbidden it was nevertheless done, and at the King's expense. In the 1750's officers' families were living at Fort Niagara.

During a summer the Fort would have as many as 5,000 visitors. Large supplies were needed to accommodate these people, the Indians who worked as carriers on the portage, and the residents of the Fort itself. The Fort depended upon the King's supply ships to bring food and trade goods from the St. Lawrence. Very often the ships could not come, or most of the supplies had been stolen in transit by soldiers or carriers. Then there would be a very



hard winter and men would desert or mutiny. There were no settlers nearby, as there were at other forts, to bring vegetables and flour, and the Senecas would not always bring fresh meat. Some winters the Indians had smallpox, so they could not hunt. During the winter of 1744 they were annoyed they had not been given brandy, so they boycotted the Fort. For several years there had been no brandy because the priests refused to confess anyone who traded it, but that particular winter Philippe Joncaire was too sick to persuade the Senecas to hunt. The plight of Fort Niagara was not helped by the English wampum belts sent among the tribes telling of the goods and liquor at Oswego.

France and England were at war four times during the last part of the French occupation of North America. There were King William's War (1689-97); Queen Anne's War (1703-1713); King George's War (1744-1748); and the French and Indian War (1754-1763). Although between wars the countries were officially at peace, they continued fighting in North America because both were using the same sources for their fur trade. Up until the last war France was the stronger of the two, and one of her major assets was the control of the Niagara Frontier. The Joncaires continually visited the Senecas, giving them presents so that the French would be allowed to keep Fort Niagara. In fact, the French were more careful of the Senecas' allegiance than of the Fort. They were apt to neglect old forts while they were building new ones in their effort to control the continent's interior. In 1744 there were only 34 men stationed at Niagara, and in 1754 not only could the palisades have been pushed over, but the men were afraid to fire the cannon because the earthworks they were mounted on might crumble. In 1755 when Braddock started marching for the Niagara, the French realized the Fort should be made into a stronghold. Captain Francois Pouchot, a military engineer, was sent to strengthen it. During the next four years earthworks were built as well as moats, a powder magazine, a hospital, and a storehouse. In spite of these improvements, the Fort was forced to surrender to the British in 1759 after an eighteen-day siege. This was not due to any weakness in the fortifications. It was simply that the British had become stronger than the French in North America.

The English turned the tide of war by sending ample war funds to the American colonies. When William Pitt became Prime Minister of England in 1757, he knew that more arms and men were needed to win the war in North America. He found the money for them, and generally speaking the English got what they paid for. On the other hand France for a long time had been spending a great deal of money on North America for very little return. The king was always being cheated. We have seen examples of this in the stealing from supply ships, in illegal trading, and in over-ordering for expeditions. Even the Montreal and Quebec officials robbed the king by deliber-

ately buying supplies at very high prices. As a result the prices for provisions for Fort Niagara in 1759 were eight times greater than in 1755! Because of such cheating and waste New France had little chance of defeating the British when it came to a showdown at Fort Niagara.

The British had prepared for a vigorous attack. Sir William Johnson had worked among the Cayugas, Mohawks, and Onondagas for many years just as the Joncaires had visited among the Senecas. He had become so well liked and respected by the Indians that in 1756 King George II commissioned him "colonel, agent, and sole superintendent of the affairs of the Six Nations, and other northern Indians." Consequently when General John Prideaux needed Indians in the siege of Niagara, Johnson was able to join him near Oswego with about a thousand warriors. Prideaux led about 2200 British troops and militia. On July 1, 1759, this combined force sailed from Oswego and on July 5 were four miles east of Fort Niagara on Lake Ontario. The next day the siege began.

For the following seventeen days the 500 men inside the Fort held off the enemy while they anxiously awaited reinforcements. As each day passed the British lines drew closer; French muskets wore out; supplies diminished; wooden buildings caught fire; men were killed or wounded; women and children worked frantically to fill bags with earth to replace the bastions. On July 24 the relief force requested by Pouchot from Presqu' Isle June 27, approached from the west. Runners had taken Pouchot's message for help as far as the Mississippi. Over 600 traders, coureurs de bois, and officers answered. They had gathered at Presqu' Isle (Erie, Pennsylvania) and with a thousand Western Indians in war paint had made up the largest flotilla ever to sweep over Lake Erie. They came down the east bank of the Niagara, right into the ambush set up by Johnson's Indians at La Belle Famille (Youngstown) far enough upstream to be out of range of the Fort. No one ever knew how many were scalped, how many tomahawked, how many escaped. The battle cost many lives, and it marked the end of French power on the Niagara.

On July 25 Fort Niagara surrendered to Johnson, who had commanded the British forces after Prideaux was killed in battle. Captain Pouchot invited the British officers to dinner and soon after, the French soldiers, as prisoners, started on their way to England; the officers were taken to New York, the women and children back to France. Then the Indians, even the former allies of the French, plundered the castle.

With this defeat, and with the loss of other important points—Fort Duquesne, Crown Point, Fort Ticonderoga, Ogdensburg, Fort Frontenac—French power in the West as well as on the Niagara ended. The crowning defeat was the loss of Quebec on September 13, 1759, when British General Wolfe overcame Montcalm on the Plains of Abraham. In 1763 the war was settled by the Treaty of Paris which gave the important French territory east of the Mississippi River to England.





*Officers Room, Fort Niagara, dedicated to the memory of Colonial and Revolutionary prisoners.*

The fur trade continued under the British at Fort Niagara and other posts much as it had under the French, except that one government agent was given all the trade in an area so that the gun-and-rum trade could be controlled. The Indians were still dependent upon trade for blankets, broadcloth, knives, powder and flints, flour, bracelets, tomahawks, guns, and liquor. They would come to the Trade Room at Fort Niagara to exchange rich beaver pelts for British goods just as they had exchanged them for French goods.

Sir William Johnson also continued working to make friends of the Indians, so that by the time of his death in 1774 he was one of the richest and most powerful men in North America. Sometimes the Indians were not as generously treated as they had been when the French and British were rivals trying to win Indian friendships away from each other. They were treated well enough, however, so that at the time of the Revolution all of the Iroquois, except the Oneidas who remained neutral, became allies of the British.

During the Revolutionary War Fort Niagara became the headquarters for raids on American frontier settlements between Albany and Detroit. Colonel Guy Johnson, Sir William's nephew and successor, lived at Fort Niagara and directed the raiding parties. They were called "Butler's Rangers" because John Butler and his son Walter were the leaders, along with the Indian Joseph Brant, William Johnson's brother-in-law. These groups, made up of Indians, Tories, and renegades, would sweep down on a settlement and destroy everything in sight: crops, homes, mills. Very often captives were brought back to Fort Niagara. Just as often scalps were taken by the Indians for trading at the Fort's Trade Room. The Indians frequently were difficult to control, especially if they had been drinking "firewater." That is why their raids on the Wyoming and Cherry Valley in 1778 became massacres.

Savage though it was to raid unprotected pioneer families, the raids did have military purposes. The attacks on the rich farms of New York's Mohawk Valley destroyed grain needed by Washington's army. This destruction helped cause the terrible suffering at Valley Forge. The Wyoming and



*Chapel in "The Castle," Fort Niagara.*

Cherry Valley campaigns were planned not only to destroy supplies, but also to lure some of the American forces away from opposing the main British army under Sir William Howe.

In the summer of 1779 Washington sent one-third of his Colonial Army on an expedition to stop the raids from Fort Niagara. Not only were supplies being destroyed, but men were either deserting or refusing to join the army so that they could be home to protect their families from the Indians. It also had become clear that the British were preparing a major offensive to split the colonies in two by driving from the Fort southeastward through the Indian country of New York and Pennsylvania.

Washington directed General John Sullivan to march from Easton, Pennsylvania to Tioga Point to meet General James Clinton's New York Brigade moving from Schenectady. The combined forces under Sullivan were then to march to the Genesee Valley to meet a small force from Fort Pitt. Together they would capture Fort Niagara.

The Fort never was taken because the Sullivan expedition did not have enough supplies or men to attempt it when they reached the Genesee Valley, and the Fort Pitt troops did not have enough supplies to take them farther than Salamanca, New York. Sullivan did carry out Washington's instructions to "Lay waste all the settlements around, so that the country may not only be overrun, but destroyed." Iroquois settlements and crops were destroyed between Tioga and the Genesee River. As a result of Sullivan's expedition the Iroquois power was crushed forever, the threat of British attack came to an end, and most of the raids stopped.

The winter of '79 was the worst in the history of Fort Niagara. Thousands of Indians had fled to the Fort for food and shelter, but the Fort, already crowded with Loyalists who were escaping to Canada, could not take care of all its homeless allies. Since most of the Fort's supplies came from England, it was impossible to get additional needed supplies. The British tried to persuade the frightened Indians to return home or to go to Montreal, or even to

go on raiding parties, but they refused. As a result nearly 4,000 Indians died of disease and starvation. The next summer the British were successful in establishing several settlements for the homeless Indians. One of these was on Buffalo Creek.

When the Revolution was over and the Treaty of Paris signed in 1783, Fort Niagara as well as many other British forts along the present American-Canadian border became American property. The British nevertheless refused to move out because the American government owed money to Loyalists for property that had been taken during the War, and because the British also wanted to use the forts in evacuating the Loyalists. Until the Jay Treaty was signed in 1796, thirteen years later, the British continued to occupy the Fort and would not let American settlers or travelers into the area without permission. Finally in 1796 the British moved out, and the United States flag flew over Niagara.

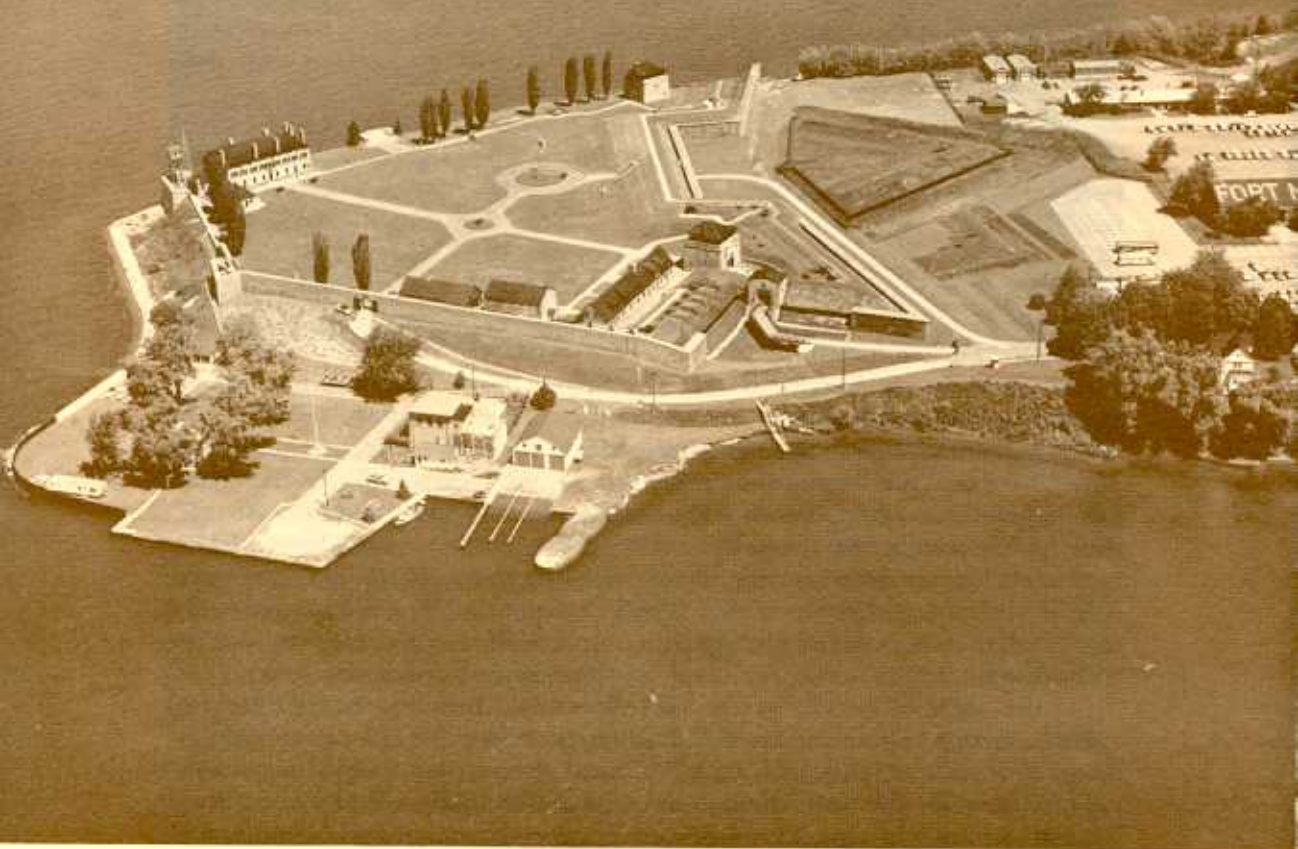
It was not long before the British were back in the Fort. When the War of 1812 broke out, the Americans decided that the Niagara Frontier should be a principal theater of operations. On occasion Fort Niagara and Fort George, the British fort across the river at Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake), bombarded each other. In the spring of 1813 the Americans took Fort George and held it until December when they heard that the British were on their way to retake it. General Joseph McClure, American commander, decided to withdraw his forces across the river and wantonly burned the town.

On the night of December 18, 1813, five to six hundred British, seeking revenge, with a large number of Indian allies crossed the river near Youngstown and marched towards Fort Niagara. From two American pickets, captured outside the Fort, the watchword was obtained and the British took the Fort without firing a shot. Although the Commandant had been warned to expect an attack, he had left to "visit his family," and thus a large supply of clothing, food, arms, and ammunition fell into the hands of the enemy. When the British General Riall heard the Fort had been taken, he marched along the Niagara River, avenging Newark by burning Lewiston, Manchester (Niagara Falls), Black Rock, and Buffalo. The British occupied the Fort until several months after the signing of the Treaty of Ghent in 1814, which ended the war between England and the United States.

With the close of the War of 1812 Fort Niagara's active military history ended. Gradually new buildings were erected to the south, until there was an entirely separate and modern Fort Niagara. Only in emergencies such as during the Civil War would the old buildings be used.

In 1927 a group of individuals and organizations interested in preserving historical landmarks formed the Old Fort Niagara Association. With the help of the United States Government the Association restored the buildings and fortifications. Today we may visit Old Fort Niagara to relive its history under three flags.





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*Sir William Johnson from Parkman's Works, Public Archives of Canada.*